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Cotton is Still King

A radio conversation between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, Mr. E. J. Rowell, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, and Mr. John Baker, Office of Information, broadcast Wednesday, February 1, 1939, in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home program, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 93 associate radio stations.

--ooOoo--

JOHN BAKER:

We're stepping up our schedule this week--getting a day ahead of ourselves. Though this is Wednesday (at least I think the calendar said Wednesday when I tore off the leaf this morning)--anyway your two regular Thursday reporters, Ruth Van Deman and E. J. (Mike) Rowell, are here and all ready to go on with a discussion they started a few minutes ago about cotton. Mike, what was that I heard you saying about cotton still being king? Or was that just wishful thinking on your part?

E. J. ROWELL:

Not at all. Cotton is still king. I've lots of figuresphere of Agriculture

BAKER:

I might have known, Mike, you'd be loaded with statistics.

ROWELL:

As usual.

RUTH VAN DEMAN:

I could add a few too if necessary. John, do you know how much cotton goods goes into men's shirts every year in these United States?

BAKER:

About 15 or 20 million yards I suppose.

VAN DEMAN:

Somewhere about 460 million yards. That's counting dress and everyday shirts for men and boys. It doesn't take in sport shirts and pull-overs, and things like that.

ROWELL:

Yes, cotton's king for shirts, and for dozens of other articles we wear and use around the house.

VAN DEMAN:

In fact, there's more cotton used in this country, didn't you say, than all the other textile fibers put together?

ROWELL:

Far and away. Used and produced. In the South cotton's the most important source of cash income on about two million farms.

VAN DEMAN:

Then the shirt on your back puts money in the pocket of the cotton farmer down South.

(over)

ROWELL:

So he can have a shirt on his back. That's right.

VAN DEMAN:

And all those demands for shirts added up help to keep the wheels of the mills moving.

ROWELL:

That's the cycle.

BAKER:

But, Ruth, where do the women come in on this?

VAN DEMAN:

Oh I think we use our 25 pounds per capita every year. Maybe this wool dress of mine doesn't look as though I were doing much for the cotton farmer. But this is chilly weather.

BAKER:

And aren't those stockings made of silk?

VAN DEMAN:

They are, mostly. The heels and toes are cotton. Most of the silk and rayon stockings are reinforced with cotton where the greatest rub comes. I'm looking forward though to the Bureau's new designs for all-cotton stockings.

ROWELL:

I didn't know you people were researching on cotton hosiery---

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, Congress commissioned us last year to find out what we could do to improve the yarn, and the weave, and the fit and style of cotton stockings.

BAKER:

Do you think that cotton will ever be king again in that field?

VAN DEMAN:

I wouldn't venture to predict on that, not on anything connected with style in women's clothes.

BAKER:

Safer not--much, much safer.

ROWELL:

Fashion is spinach.

VAN DEMAN:

But there is an increasing demand for good quality mercerized cotton hose, full-fashioned so they'll fit and hold their shape. Under Miss O'Brien's direction the textile people have had some made that look very attractive--nice color and good shape. They're running rub and stretch tests on them now.

ROWELL:

Everybody interested in cotton will want to know more about that project.

VAN DEMAN:

They hope to go on and study more about the grades, and staple lengths, and varieties of cotton suited to hosiery. They'll have yarns woven of spun cottons of known history knitted into hose, and the hose put through regular service tests.

ROWELL:

In this whole cotton problem, of course, that's just what we need--more facts about the grade and staple length of cotton suited to specific uses.

VAN DEMAN:

The kind of cooperative study that your bureau and mine has done on sheets.

ROWELL:

Precisely. We have the second of those technical reports in the press now, haven't we?

VAN DEMAN:

Yes, It'll be out any day now.

ROWELL:

And getting around to sheets and bath towels, that's where cotton is king

VAN DEMAN:

Is and will continue to be. I'm not afraid to predict on that.

BAKER:

May I put in a word for sheets that are long--good and long--

VAN DEMAN:

The 108 inch sheet, that's probably what you want.

ROWELL:

Or what about the 113?

VAN DEMAN:

That's torn length of course--about 108 inches when it's hemmed. Well, if everybody buying sheets could get the long ones, the U.S.A. would certainly be a pleasanter place to sleep in.

BAKER:

Mike, have you figured that out? How much more cotton that would use?

ROWELL:

Not yet. But I do know we use every year something over 125 million pounds of cotton for the manufacture of sheets and pillow cases.

VAN DEMAN:

And it takes roughly about 2 pounds of cotton to make the average bed sheet.

ROWELL:

About 88 million more pounds of cotton every year goes into towels and toweling.

BAKER:

I'm all for bigger and better bath towels too.

VAN DEMAN:

Something about 24 by 48 inches, with a thick, soft, fluffy pile?

BAKER:

Is that big enough?

VAN DEMAN:

It's bigger than the general run. If you get bath towels too big, they're hard to handle in the home laundry and expensive to send out to the commercial, if you're paying for laundry by the pound.

ROWELL:

Is that thick soft pile the best to absorb moisture?

VAN DEMAN:

It seems to be.

ROWELL:

I like a towel that drinks the water right up.

VAN DEMAN:

There are cotton dish towels these days that do that pretty well too. They are lint proof, and absorbent, and much less expensive of course than good linen. There are improvements in weaving and finishing cotton goods coming out all the time. The shrinkage and wrinkle-resistant treatments of course are two of the best helps to the consumer.

BAKER:

All these improvements in manufacture tend to stimulate our use of cotton,

ROWELL:

Very decidedly. In 1935 we made close to two billion pounds of cotton woven goods. Probably that figure was even higher last year.

BAKER:

Well, Mike, I can see I shouldn't have questioned for a moment that cotton is still king. Now, Ruth, going back a moment to what you said about buying sheets and bath towels, is it all right for me to remind our listeners of that excellent bulletin from your textile division?

VAN DEMAN:

Guides for Buying Sheets, Blankets, and Bath Towels? It certainly is.

BAKER:

And, Mike, what have you to offer on cotton--any bulletin from your bureau discussing cotton in general?

ROWELL:

Yes, we have a very nice little leaflet called "Facts About Cotton". It has a picture of a cotton plant on the cover. And inside are maps showing where cotton is grown, and pictures of cotton fields and cotton ginning, and grading. and spinning and weaving.

BAKER:

That's the kind of a leaflet school children are very anxious to get hold of when they're studying cotton.

ROWELL:

Yes, it's so popular with schools that the first edition was gone in no time. But we've ordered a reprint. I'm promised copies today.

BAKER:

Now let's make this offer clear. The Bureau of Agricultural Economics has a bulletin--Facts About Cotton-- and the Bureau of Home Economics has one every homemaker will want--Guides for Buying Sheets, Blankets, and Bath Towels. If you'd like copies, write to the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. Ruth will see to it that you get either or both these bulletins.

